

# Master Plan Implementation Committee

## Report to Annual Town Meeting

### April 25, 2022

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The Arlington Master Plan, “Your Town Your Future,” was adopted by approximately 75% of Town Meeting members in 2015. The Master Plan is available at:

<https://www.arlingtonma.gov/departments/planning-community-development/master-plan>.

The Town then appointed a Master Plan Implementation Committee (MPIC) which generally meets quarterly to oversee and ensure plan implementation. MPIC reports are organized to follow the topic areas of the Master Plan: Land Use, Traffic and Circulation, Housing and Residential Development, Economic Development, Historic and Cultural Resource Areas, Natural Resources and Open Space, and Public Facilities and Services. The MPIC has two working subcommittees: the Zoning Bylaw Working Group and the Historic and Cultural Resources Working Group. The Mill Brook Corridor Working Group was inactive in 2021 but will resume meeting in 2022.

This report provides Town Meeting a summary of accomplishments over the past year and also ongoing and upcoming efforts to implement the plan. More information on these efforts can be found at:

<https://www.arlingtonma.gov/departments/planning-community-development/projects-plans-reports>.

#### Land Use

- **Study and consider techniques that could address concern for neighborhood impacts of new large homes constructed in existing residential neighborhoods.** The Zoning Bylaw Working Group reviewed proposed zoning bylaw amendments for Town Meeting consideration in 2022, including Article 33 (Half Story), Article 34 (Porches), Article 35 (Yard Encroachment), and Article 36 (Large Additions).

#### Traffic and Circulation

- **Implementation of Connect Arlington, the Sustainable Transportation Plan.** In 2021, the Sustainable Transportation Plan Advisory Committee and DPCD completed the Sustainable Transportation Plan, known as Connect Arlington. The MPIC supplanted the Traffic and Circulation element of the Master Plan with the Connect Arlington recommendations. Connect Arlington will ensure that all Arlingtonians, workers, business owners and visitors are provided a safe, reliable, multimodal transportation network that meets the needs of all ages and abilities. The actions described below advance key recommendations of Connect Arlington.
- **Address issues regarding the Minuteman Bikeway to give more visibility to pedestrians and bicyclists; provide safe connections between the Minuteman Bikeway and the three main commercial centers.** The Minuteman Bikeway Planning Study commenced in December 2021 with consultant, Kittleson and Associates. This project focuses on developing a shared community vision and implementation plan for the Minuteman Bikeway. It was funded through the Community Preservation Act.

The Mystic River Path to Minuteman Bikeway Feasibility Study is progressing simultaneously. DPCD is working with consultant, Toole Design Group, and in collaboration with the Mystic River Watershed Association (MyRWA) to review existing trails and the feasibility of creating new trails along the Mystic River to better connect the Alewife Brook Greenway to the Minuteman Bikeway. The project advances recommendations in Connect Arlington, the DCR Parkways Master Plan, and the MyRWA’s Mystic Greenways Initiative. The study was made possible through an \$80,000 grant from the Mass Trails Program and \$10,000 from the Lawrence and Lillian Solomon Foundation.

- **Continue to support and expand the Safe Routes to School program to encourage more biking and walking to school.** The Town is planning pedestrian safety improvements near the Stratton Elementary School. The proposed project will provide a fully accessible walking route with safe

roadway crossings for children and others walking to Stratton along Hemlock Street between Brattle Street and Dickson Avenue and Dickson Avenue between Hemlock Street and Pheasant Avenue. DPCD continues to work with MassDOT's consultant, AECOM, to guide the project through the MassDOT project development process. The project will be funded in Fiscal Year 2024 through a MassDOT Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Project Award. DPCD and the Transportation Advisory Committee are also working with other schools on arrival and dismissal audits that may lead to future recommendations as part of the SRTS program.

- **Expand the regional bike share program into Arlington.** In 2020, the Town became part of the Bluebikes regional bike share system, providing the community with a sustainable transportation solution. Bluebikes is the docked bike share system that operates in Boston, Cambridge, Brookline, Everett, Somerville, Newton, and Watertown. Six stations were reinstalled in East Arlington and Arlington Center in the Spring of 2021 and will be reinstalled this Spring. A community survey exploring options for an additional two stations to extend the network through the Center and toward Arlington Heights was administered in April 2022. DPCD is requesting an appropriation of \$100,000 to support two years of operations, maintenance, and assistance to income-eligible users of the Bluebikes bikeshare program (Article 60), which advances this goal of the Master Plan. Article 3 at Special Town Meeting proposes to amend the sign bylaw to allow Bluebikes docking station signage as a new sign type.
- **Adopt a plan for future sidewalk paving design treatments according to density and road geometry, consistent with the Sidewalks Plan.** With the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) project at Broadway Plaza nearing completion, the reconstruction of Broadway Plaza will commence this Spring. This project will complete the Arlington Center Sidewalk Project for the eastern section of Arlington Center, which entailed the removal of brick sidewalks and replacement with a sidewalk paving design that will improve safety.
- **Identify intersections with pedestrian safety issues and prioritize improvements for problem intersections.** The Department of Public Works (DPW) completes curb ramp and curb cut improvements to address pedestrian safety and accessibility annually. In fiscal year 2022, DPW made improvements to 61 curb ramps using CDBG funds.

#### **Housing and Residential Development**

- **Create a Housing Production Plan and Submit to DHCD for approval under Chapter 40B.** The Town's prior Housing Production Plan (HPP) expired in late 2021. The Plan positioned the Town to better meet local market-rate and affordable housing needs and demand, and in doing so work towards the State's Chapter 40B statutory minimum requirement that 10 percent the housing in a town be affordable. Due to the approval of the Comprehensive Permit Application for 1165R Massachusetts Avenue, the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development certified the 2016 HPP, providing the Town temporary "safe harbor" through September 2022. At the same time, DPCD with the Housing Plan Implementation Committee worked with Barrett Planning Group, LLC, and Horsley Witten Group to develop an update to the HPP. This was adopted by the Arlington Redevelopment Board in January. The HPP Update consists of three major components: a housing needs and demand assessment; an analysis of development constraints, capacity, and opportunities in Town; and an implementation plan consisting of housing goals and strategies to achieve them. The HPP Update was funded by the Community Development Block Grant Program.
- **Allocate Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and CPA resources to meet local housing needs and work toward meeting the Town's affordable housing goal.** In the Summer of 2021, the Town, working with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) and the Lawyers' Committee on Civil Rights Under Law (LCCR), completed the Fair Housing Action Plan. The plan describes Arlington's local and regional history of housing discrimination and residential segregation and describes specific recommended actions the Town can take to ensure equitable access to housing choice. The plan includes an extensive analysis of existing fair housing conditions as well as

recommendations such as increasing awareness and education pertaining to fair housing, amending policies and zoning that restrict fair housing options, and assisting members of protected classes with attaining and retaining housing. Several plan recommendations involve an evaluation of funding resources and the process of allocating funds.<sup>1</sup> The plan was funded by the CDBG Program and through MAPC's District Local Technical Assistance Program.

2020 Special Town Meeting voted to establish the Arlington Affordable Housing Trust for the purpose of creating a separate fund "to provide for the preservation and creation of Community Housing in the Town of Arlington."<sup>2</sup> The Select Board appointed the Board of Trustees in the fall of 2021, after which the Trustees began their initial work by drafting, receiving Select Board approval for, and executing a Declaration of Trust. The Declaration of Trust was recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds and filed with the Middlesex South Registry District of the Land Court. Presently, the Trust is working on the development of an Annual Action Plan, which will closely align with recommendations in the Fair Housing Action Plan and Housing Production Plan. The Trust requested \$250,000 in Community Preservation Act Funds to begin its work in financing affordable housing production (Article 62).

### **Economic Development**

- **Pandemic-Related Activities.** As in 2020, many of the Town's pandemic-related activities advanced goals of the Master Plan. DPCD's Economic Development Coordinator continued to provide dedicated support to the Arlington business community during the coronavirus pandemic and the resulting economic impacts. The Coordinator continued work with the Arlington Economic Development Recovery Task Force to establish, create, and implement policies and regulations that will help drive and revive our economic recovery. In January 2022, DPCD staff administered the Small Business and Nonprofit Working Capital Grant Fund to provide financial resources to Arlington's businesses and nonprofits to assist with their recovery from the impacts of the pandemic. A total of 133 eligible applications were received and reviewed through a competitive process; 81 small businesses and nonprofits were selected to receive a total of \$639,100 in working capital grants, funded by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). Updates on ARPA activities may be found at [arlingtonma.gov/ARPA](https://arlingtonma.gov/ARPA).

In partnership with the Towns of Bedford and Lexington, Arlington was awarded and completed a study as part of a Local Rapid Recovery Planning (LRRP) grant by the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (MDI). The three towns coordinated on the resulting report, *Three Business Districts and One Bikeway... Getting Past COVID*, recommends ways to leverage the traffic on the shared asset of the Minuteman Bikeway to drive more customers to the Arlington Heights, East Lexington, and Bedford Center business districts as a recovery strategy from the pandemic.

- **Adopt a policy that recognizes and conveys the importance of Arlington's arts, culture, and historical significance in economic development and tourism.** Throughout 2021, the Economic Development Coordinator worked with the Select Board, the Recreation Department, and the Department of Public Works to ensure that local businesses could utilize outdoor spaces to support business activities. The Select Board provided the ability for permitting to be handled administratively in an expeditious manner to allow businesses to hold classes outdoors in public spaces such as parks and other recreational facilities and to allow restaurants and food establishments to utilize sidewalks for outdoor dining. A zoning amendment regarding open space uses before 2022 Town Meeting (Article 42) would take the temporary relief granted due to the pandemic and codify it in the Zoning Bylaw, allowing these types of temporary activities to continue

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<sup>1</sup> DPCD will continue working and collaborating with the Arlington Housing Rights Commission, Disability Commission, LGBTQIA+ Rainbow Commission, Arlington Housing Authority, the Housing Corporation of Arlington, and other Town bodies and organizations dedicated to housing and equity to achieve the benchmarks outlined in the plan.

<sup>2</sup> As such term is defined in Section 2 of M.G.L. c.44B, the Community Preservation Act (CPA).

if they have advance approval by the body which has jurisdiction over a particular open space (e.g., the Park and Recreation Commission), but without the need for a redundant, second approval from the ARB or Zoning Board of Appeals.

Further, with the support of a third MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces grant, the Medford Street parklet was upgraded with new furnishings, including seating, umbrellas, and plantings. The parklet program continued throughout 2021 with public parklets and other public space improvements installed throughout Arlington Center and Arlington Heights. These regulations enhance public and private outdoor seating, ensure pedestrian safety, and provide bicycle parking infrastructure. Converting parking spaces, short stretches of roadways, and pedestrian alleyways into safer areas to dine outdoors, walk, and travel by bicycle assisted businesses by providing additional public space for their customers' use and safer means of access to commercial centers during the pandemic.

### **Historic and Cultural Resource Areas**

- **Place preservation restrictions on Town-owned historic properties not already protected.** Working with the Historic and Cultural Resources Working Group, the DPCD completed the Community-Wide Historic Preservation Survey Master Plan in 2019. Acting on the recommendations in the plan, DPCD received CPA funding through 2020 Special Town Meeting to complete two projects: documentation of historic municipal resources and a community-wide archaeological reconnaissance survey. In the fall of 2021, DPCD released an RFP to commence the project to document historic municipal resources with the goal of developing or updating survey and inventory forms for 20 Town-owned properties, including an anticipated 11 historic landscapes, one burial ground, and eight buildings. This will enable the Town to pursue grant funding to preserve these historic properties. A request for proposals was released in Spring, 2022 to solicit a consultant to lead the archaeological reconnaissance survey. The study will produce a comprehensive inventory of known archaeologically sensitive historic and cultural landscapes, including Mill Brook, industrial areas near Spy Pond, Elizabeth Island, and Town-owned recreational areas, and will identify areas of high potential for further planning and preservation. This project will lay the groundwork for potential additional protections of these assets, if necessary.

### **Natural Resources and Open Space**

- **Update of the Open Space and Recreation Plan.** The Open Space Committee, with assistance from DPCD, is nearing completion of an update to the 2015-2022 Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP), which will expire this year. The update will extend the lifetime of the plan for seven years through 2029. Consultant Horsley Witten Group was hired in early 2021 to facilitate the development of the plan. The Town has had an approved OSRP in place since 1996. This update will be the fifth such Plan. It serves as a foundational document for all Town planning and programs relating to parks, playgrounds, playing fields, natural resources, conservation land, sustainable development, climate resiliency, and other open space issues. Communities with an approved OSRP are eligible to apply for funding from the Local Acquisitions for Natural Diversity (LAND) Program, Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities (PARC) Program, Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Program, and other grant programs administered by the State. This project is funded through Community Preservation Act funds.
- **Use more native and natural choices for landscaping on Town-owned properties; consider replacement of some grass areas with native groundcovers.** In January 2022, the Town released a request for proposals to identify a consultant to assist with the creation of a Public Land Management Plan (PLMP) for all open space, recreational land, and other natural resources in line with other Town plans. Landscape Architecture firm KZLA was selected to work with the Public Land Management Working Group to identify a structure for maintaining and managing relevant lands, provide analysis of the policies that govern the lands in question, and advise on the treatment of such lands, including recommendations of best practices. This project is funded through Community Preservation Act funds.

- **Address street tree problems, including the replacement of trees lost due to age, storms, and the failed survival of many newly planted trees. Coordinate tree care between the Town and property owners.** In 2020 and 2021, staff worked with the Arlington Tree Committee to develop and implement the Adopt-a-Tree program to encourage residents to assist with watering of young trees during the summer months. Article 29, a zoning amendment to incorporate public shade tree plantings into site development standards for properties under the Redevelopment Board’s jurisdiction, advances the master plan goal of addressing tree concerns and coordinating care of public shade trees between the Town and property owners. The Master Plan states that in addition to environmental and public health benefits, trees have a significant impact on the quality of the pedestrian experience in Arlington’s commercial centers and neighborhoods.
- **Update Arlington’s sustainability action plan and address Arlington’s concerns about flooding and climate change.** In 2021, the Clean Energy Future Committee completed a Net Zero Action Plan to guide Arlington to net zero greenhouse gas pollution by 2050. Arlington partnered with the City of Melrose, Town of Natick, and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) on a joint project to develop greenhouse gas inventories and net zero plans for all three communities. The project was funded through a technical assistance grant by MAPC. Article 30 (Solar Energy Systems) advances a recommendation of the Net Zero Action Plan by requiring the installation of solar energy systems on buildings subject to Environmental Design Review.

#### **Public Facilities and Services**

- **Prepare a feasibility study for an updated Community Center/Senior Center.** The Community Center was completed in Spring 2022. The project began in earnest with a Feasibility Study for a Multi-Purpose Senior Center in 2017. Capital funds were used to hire an Owner’s Project Manager (OPM) and designer for the renovation project in 2017 and 2018. Construction of the \$8.1 million project began in March 2020 and continued through Spring 2022. The renovation includes the Community Center, Town offices, and building-wide improvements.
- **Study and develop a plan for addressing Arlington’s long-term public works related needs.** Renovation and expansion of the Department of Public Works (DPW) facility is underway. This project will transform the existing buildings into a modern facility that serves multiple Town departments. The Information Technology Department has moved into one of the newly renovated buildings, and construction of new buildings for DPW and the Inspectional Services Department is scheduled to begin soon. The project is overseen by the Town Manager’s Office, the Director of Public Works, the Permanent Town Building Committee, and the Town’s Owner’s Representative.

Respectfully submitted by the Master Plan Implementation Committee:

Joseph Barr (Co-Chair), ARB appointee	Charles Kalauskas (Co-Chair), Select Board appointee
Adam Chapdelaine, Town Manager, ex officio	Ann LeRoy, Town Meeting Moderator appointee
Wendy Richter, ARB appointee	Michael Ciampa, Inspectional Services, ex officio
Peter Howard, Finance Committee appointee	Ralph Willmer, Select Board appointee

with staff support from Jennifer Raitt, Director of Planning and Community Development, and Kelly Lynema, Assistant Director of Planning and Community Development. Additional information about the Master Plan Implementation Committee may be found on its website, including tracking progress on the Master Plan’s recommendations and actions: <https://www.arlingtonma.gov/town-governance/boards-and-committees/master-plan-implementation-committee>.